

MHR *Connections*

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Start a new day!

National Aboriginal Day at the Forks



Hundreds of elementary school children spent June 21, National Aboriginal Day, at the Forks watching a powwow celebration, which included a Grand Entrance, hoop and jingle dancers and listening to the Sacred Ground Singers. Elder Calvin Pompana hosted and said that June 21 is a time to start a new day.



National Aboriginal Day is an opportunity for everyone to celebrate and honour the rich culture, traditions and contributions of Canada's first peoples. The first National Aboriginal Day was proclaimed in 1996 and celebrated on June 21st, which coincides with the summer solstice.



During the ceremony, great grand mothers, grand mothers and mothers were honoured for keeping Aboriginal traditions alive. The children and adults watching the dancers were invited to participate during the inter-tribal dance. The event was presented by the White Buffalo Society.

The Rights Connection by Janet Baldwin - Chairperson Mind the Gap

Twenty years ago, writing reasons for a unanimous Supreme Court in the landmark case of *Action Travail des Femmes v. Canadian National Railway Company*, the Right Honourable Brian Dickson, P.C. spoke of the importance of a "critical mass" of a previously excluded group in a workplace.

Justice Dickson said: "This 'critical mass' has an important effect. The presence of a significant number of individuals from the targeted group eliminates the problems of 'tokenism'; it is no longer the case that one or two women, for example, will be seen to 'represent' all women....moreover, women will not be so easily placed on the periphery of management concern."

That case dealt with discriminatory hiring practices of C.N.R. when women applied for non-traditional, blue collar jobs. Justice Dickson noted that with critical mass, the desire to work such jobs becomes less stigmatized, applications are taken more seriously and there is "a significant chance for the continuing self-correction of the system."

This month a Statistics Canada study revealed that as of 2001, young women were still earning 17.9% less than young men, despite 31.3% of women in the workforce having university degrees, as compared to 21.6% of men. This may have to do with the continued undervaluing of traditional areas of women's employment, such as education and health.

In our recent provincial election, Manitobans elected eighteen women to the Legislature. Women now make up nearly a third of Manitoba's 57 MLAs, a number which may constitute a "critical mass". Let us hope that this result may help address the conditions of women in our province.

Premier Gary Doer, when informed that the Manitoba legislature now ranks first in its representation of women, reportedly said that having more women in the legislature will bring a broader perspective to the debate, and that: "It means what happens around the caucus table mimics something that happens around the kitchen table." Too often, however, what happens around kitchen tables is that women are still doing most of the domestic work.

"Amazing" new youth rights group emerges

Over the years, the Maples Unity Group has been active in promoting human rights and fighting racism under the guidance of teacher Chuck Duboff. The success of the group culminated in 2005 when it received the Sybil Shack Memorial Manitoba Human Rights Youth Award. Success was repeated in 2006 when Mr. Duboff won the Manitoba Human Rights Commitment Award.

So where do they go from here? Mr. Duboff says he is making a long held dream come true by starting a new group, which brings together leaders from high schools all around the city. The group is called FAIRE (Fostering Awareness of Individual Rights Everywhere) and already students from seven city schools are involved.

"The energy, which these outstanding young people have exhibited in the first few meetings, has taken my breath away," says Mr. Duboff, adding that the group has set its goals very high and has put such areas of concern as fair trade, child sex exploitation, homelessness as well as human rights on their 'to do list.'

According to Mr. Duboff, FAIRE has identified specific projects and the students are very determined to see them come to life. He says their dedication is shown by meeting throughout June and working on projects over the summer. "What more needs to be said about these amazing young people," he says.

The Commission recognizes the work of young people and hopes this group receives all the support needed to realize its goals.

Nominations are now being accepted for the 2007 Winnipeg Accessibility Award

This award raises awareness regarding the importance of accessibility in the City of Winnipeg. It is presented to a facility or environment, and its designers, that is an outstanding example of universal design.

The Call for Nominations and Nomination Forms are available at:

www.aacwinnipeg.mb.ca
or call 204.986.8345

Pride Day 2007

Thousands of people gathered in Memorial Park and lined the boulevard as hundreds more marched from the grounds of the Legislature to join in celebration of Pride Day. Organizers of the Winnipeg Pride Festival for 2007 say it was a resounding success, with over 5000 people (with one count as high as 10,000) showing up on Pride Sunday, June 10, to participate in the free Outdoor festival.



EFFECTIVE MEDIATION CONCLUDES HUMAN RIGHTS COMPLAINTS

Manitoba Justice and Elizabeth Fry Society Agree to Improved Conditions for Incarcerated Women

The Manitoba Human Rights Commission is pleased that a settlement has been reached to resolve two complaints filed by the Elizabeth Fry Society against the Government of Manitoba about the treatment of women incarcerated at the Portage Correctional Centre (PCC). The resolution of the issues was facilitated by the Commission. The Elizabeth Fry Society is a community-based organization that works with and for women and girls in the justice system.

Janet Baldwin, Chairperson of the Manitoba Human Rights Commission said, "The parties have achieved a good working relationship through the Commission's mediation process. The agreement reveals a commitment by both to work towards the goal of accommodating the special needs of incarcerated women."

Debra Parkes, President of the Elizabeth Fry Society Board, said that the key for the EFS is to improve the situation for incarcerated women and to put in place mechanisms to continue that progress. "More people are now aware of and attentive to the situation faced by incarcerated women in this province," she said, adding "that the human rights complaints have been supported by numerous community groups." She also said that EFS is looking forward to working with the government and community partners on continuing initiatives, such as the new Women's Program Advisory Committee and the development of transitional housing for women in the community.

The EFS and Manitoba Justice settlement focused on programs that meet the needs of women, including facilitating contact between incarcerated women and their children, and which meet the special needs of Aboriginal women, women with disabilities and pregnant women.

A summary of the agreement is available on the Commission's website at www.gov.mb.ca/hrc.